

**Ambassador Tatiana Gfoeller's remarks at the First U.S.-Kyrgyz Friendship  
Basketball Tournament closing ceremony**

Bishkek, Sport Palace  
November 20, 2009

Thank you all for coming today to celebrate American/Kyrgyz sports cooperation. I particularly want to say thank you to my friend - the Director of the State Agency on Sports and Physical Culture Aidarbek Kerimkulov for joining me here today.

I also want to thank the Basketball Federation for their work in organizing this tournament and congratulate them on their successes with the Forward professional basketball league. Most of all, I want to congratulate the participants of the first Kyrgyz-American Basketball Friendship Tournament. This tournament is a wonderful symbol of the strong bond between our two nations.

Sports are a shared cultural passion that can bring people together across the divisions of geography, race, gender and religion. They are a powerful source of national pride, but at the same time convey mutual respect and help improve international understanding when we play by the same rules and learn about each other.

For these reasons, the American government supports sports cooperation. Last year, we brought NBA star and Olympic gold medalist Sam Perkins to Kyrgyzstan. We sent the youth basketball team survivors of last August's terrible plane crash to America to play with our young people. The group was led by coach Baktiar Kadyrov, a good friend of America and a true patriot and hero of Kyrgyzstan [GESTURE TO HIM, STARTING APPLAUSE]. They saw the huge role sports play in American culture, education, economy, and in our daily lives. We are now working with them to expand the sports culture in Kyrgyzstan, traveling to all the regions of your great country to conduct basketball master classes and discuss sports with young people.

This tournament is the result of those trips, but is not the only example of our sports cooperation. America participated for the first time this summer in the International Issyk Kul Sports Games. We have started sports competitions with the Transit Center at Manas, including a recent weightlifting event. We have also built new sports facilities for the Kyrgyz armed forces, bought sports equipment for our pilot American schools in all the oblasts of the country, and conducted many sports camps for young people.

We thus hope to continue working with our friends in Kyrgyz government and society to develop a sports culture that produces not only more Olympic victories, but also mass participation for the benefit of all Kyrgyzstan. Such results, and the friendship we build in the process, will be something we can both be proud of.

Thank you.

